

Southeast Fisheries Science Center
Miami Laboratory
75 Virginia Beach Drive
Miami, FL 33149

January 24, 2006

TO : Gerry Scott, Chief Miami SFD

FROM : Dennis Lee, Project leader
Pelagic Observer Program

SUBJECT: Fourth quarter (2005) observer coverage summary.

The Pelagic Observer Program (POP) has completed coverage of the U.S. pelagic longline fleet for the fourth quarter period of 2005 (October 1 to December 31). Selection letters were sent by certified mail service (return receipt) on September 15, 2005 to 28 vessel permit holders (owners and/or operators) for notification of observer coverage. The POP had the responsibility of the regular coverage requirement in the Northwest Atlantic, including the Gulf of Mexico, and the Caribbean Sea. In addition, the POP was also responsible for providing observers for a special Cooperative Research Program (CRP) on bycatch reduction research involving six (6) U.S. pelagic longline vessels participating in an experimental designed project. With the CRP coming to a close, only one of the six vessels was active during this quarter, in which a portion of the vessel's trip related to CRP sets (see Table 2). In general, these six vessels were utilizing their regular gear and following their typical fishing operations within their geographical fishing areas. The experimental design was comparing different hook baiting techniques (bait threaded vs. single hooked) in an alternating pattern and crews were attaching scientific equipment (time-depth recorders and hook timers) on the gear. With both POP activities combined for this quarter (Tables 1, 2, and 3), observers were deployed on 17 trips (14 vessels) and spent 174 days at sea monitoring 100 sets, thus providing a combined coverage rate of 5.4%. Of special interest, the 14 vessels observed this quarter were comprised of two (2) vessels carried over for coverage from quarter 3 (2005) and 12 vessels formally selected for quarter 4. For the purposes of this report, this document will also summarize the catch and effort for the regular coverage and the CRP coverage separately.

Of special note during this quarter, the regular coverage of the Gulf of Mexico pelagic longline fleet and its fishing activities were disrupted by hurricanes Katrina and Rita in August and September, which devastated the gulf coast, especially the

Louisiana delta. Because of the high winds (categories 3 and 4), storm surge, and flooding, the Louisiana ports of Dulac, Leeville, and Venice, where most of the Vietnamese-American vessels (about half of the Gulf of Mexico pelagic longline fleet) were severely impacted. Observer coverage of the vessels in this area was affected as many of the captains/owners continue to be displaced from their damaged homes in New Orleans, with many trying to settle into new areas. Through various sources, the POP has determined that many of the selected vessel owners in those ports have slowly returned to fishing during the months of October through December. With many having new addresses and telephone numbers, communications with the permit holders and this office have continued to be difficult. In addition to this circumstance, selection of 2006 first quarter vessels as it relates to the gulf coverage will also be affected as postal service delivery for some of the New Orleans zip codes may be delayed or undeliverable until the owners update the permitting office.

Regular Coverage (8%) of the US Pelagic fleet:

For the regular observer coverage of the pelagic longline fleet during quarter 4, observers spent 169 days at sea which resulted in 96 sets observed, thus providing a coverage rate of 5.2%. During the 17 trips (Table 1), observed effort (number of sets) occurred in the geographical areas of the Gulf of Mexico (GOM), the Florida East Coast (FEC), the Mid-Atlantic Bight (MAB), Northeast Coastal (NEC), and the waters of the Sargasso Sea (SAR). Of special note to the reader, no effort was projected for the FEC or the NEC, yet effort was observed there. In addition, the effort we projected to occur in waters of the NED did not take place as the vessels fished in other waters (i.e.: the NEC, MAB, and SAR).

From Table 1, multiple trips aboard the same vessel occurred primarily due to winter storms effecting fishing activity (F/V SEA HAWK, MARY ANN, and SHARON G II). Of interest, the POP had to reschedule one of the quarter 4 vessels (F/V WHITEWATER) for coverage in early January of 2006, which reduced coverage. Another two vessels (LEROY TENNISHOE and MARY ANN) were selected for quarter 3 coverage, but had to be postponed into quarter 4. Finally, to be dealt with later, a vessel (F/V EAGLE EYE II) selected for coverage in quarter 1 (2006) departed with an observer on December 23 of which two sets did occur prior to the end of quarter 4. As this will be a longer distant water trip, the catch and effort results of these sets will not be included in this summary report. As one can see, fishing activity does not always fit conveniently into Agency reporting or coverage requirements.

Of the pelagic longline trips observed during the regular coverage by the POP, a total of 77,678 hooks were fished during the 96 sets recorded by the SEFSC program (Table 1). The total catch from the 17 pelagic longline trips observed consisted of 4,241 fish representing 37 species. The catch data was comprised of 1,365

swordfish, 298 bigeye tuna, 665 yellowfin tuna, 14 bluefin tuna, 360 albacore tuna, 86 other tuna species, 105 dolphin fish (mahi), 1 wahoo, 58 billfish species, 494 other finfish (escolar, lancetfish, etc.), 381 skates/rays, no (0) small coastal sharks, 100 large coastal sharks, 298 pelagic sharks, and 16 unidentified fish species. During the quarter, observers also recorded incidental takes of protected species (Table 3) which included 5 marine mammals (2-Pilot Whale-alive;1-unknown dolphin species-alive;1-Spotted dolphin-alive;1-Risso's dolphin-alive), 13 sea turtles (8-leatherback-alive;1-leatherback-dead;4-loggerhead-alive), and no (0) sea birds. Finally, the POP recorded no catches of sawfish during the regular coverage; this species is not likely to occur in the pelagic environment.

Although communications by telephone and faxes do occur from a small number of the owners of selected vessels prior to and during the quarter, my staff and I continue to have to place calls to most of the vessel owners to determine fishing activities and port location of the vessels. Understanding that the POP is one of three observer programs in the southeast region where coverage is mandatory, my recommendation is for the SEFSC to suggest to other NOAA-Fisheries Agency offices to send periodic notices via various methods (fax, mail, etc.) as reminders to vessel permit holders of their responsibility for contacting the POP office of their fishing activity when selected. Until the HMS or the Regional Office supports action in this initiative, much of the POP staff time will always be committed to calling marinas, fish dealers, and/or leaving messages on phone recorders in hopes of locating the vessels.

For quarter 4, the POP did not place observers on 16 of the 28 vessels selected (57%; Table 4), thus reducing the target coverage of the POP office by 92 sets. Of those not covered, six (6) of the selected vessels were not fishing due to being involved in another fishery or were impacted in September by two destructive Gulf coast hurricanes (Katrina and Rita), which reduced coverage by 31 sets. However, the hardest for the POP to contend with are the vessel owners that fail to communicate their fishing activities with the POP office (3 vessels for 25 sets), indicate they have lack of vessel bunk space-liferaft capacity-current CFVSE decal issues (6 vessels for 28 sets), or fail to update permit address to receive selection letters (1 vessel for 8 sets). This reduced the POP coverage opportunities by 61 sets. Had these 10 vessels accomplished their obligation of observer coverage, the goal of 61 sets might have allowed the POP to attain or exceed the optimal coverage of 8 percent. With these types of excuses from owners re-occurring each quarter and representing many of the same vessels on a regular basis, my staff continues to emphasize that the NOAA-Fisheries Agency should seek other alternatives of collecting data from these vessels if regular participation in observer coverage cannot be enforced.

2005 Cooperative Research Project (CRP) Bycatch Reduction Project.

The Cooperative Research Project (CRP) is a cooperative adventure between NOAA-Fisheries scientists and the fishing industry. For 2005, the fishing industry, represented by the Fisheries Research Institute (FRI), received government CRP funding. As a result, FRI contracted 6 pelagic longline vessel owners to participate in the CRP Experimental design. Two of the vessels associated with the Gulf of Mexico were each contracted to fish 50 compensated sets for the period of April to September, a second set of two vessels associated with Atlantic waters south of Hatteras (NC) were each contracted to fish 25 compensated sets for the period May to July, and a third set of two vessels associated with the waters north of Hatteras (NC) were each contracted to fish 25 compensated sets for the period of July to September. The CRP Experimental design and the vessel contracts call for 100% observer coverage to be provided by the Miami POP as long as the vessels fished the Experimental Design. For the CRP design, each of the vessel captains within their respective geographical areas agreed to configure their gear similarly (same floatline length, branchline length, hooks between floats, hook size, hooks set, and baits) which also happened to be similar to their normal fishing operations. The design also called for two baiting techniques (hooks threaded or single hooked through the bait) to be deployed in an alternating pattern throughout the longline sections. Since the project design was similar to the boats normal operations, the effort could possibly be included in the overall coverage requirement. The other item of interest is that Time-Depth Recorder (up to 30 per set) and Hook-Timer (up to 450 per set) units were deployed on the branch lines so that scientists could better understand how the marine environment effects where and how the gear fishes and when fish bite the hooks.

Of the 6 participating vessels mentioned above participating in the CRP Experimental Design project (Table 2) in 2005, only one (1) of the vessels needed to complete the required effort in the GOM during quarter 4. While making a single trip (D04024), the vessel completed its contractually required effort (4 sets) at the beginning and the remainder of its sets observed followed their normal fishing configuration. From those four (4) CRP reported sets, the observer spent 4 days at sea recording a total of 2,350 hooks. The total catch from those CRP sets consisted of 243 fish representing 14 species. The catch data was comprised of 2 swordfish, 1 bigeye tuna, 24 yellowfin tuna, 20 other tuna species, 7 wahoo, 3 billfish species, 125 other finfish (escolar, lancetfish, etc.), 16 skates/rays, no small coastal sharks, no large coastal sharks, 1 pelagic shark, and 44 unidentified fish species. The observer also recorded no incidental takes of protected species (Table 3). Finally, the POP recorded no catches of sawfish during the CRP Experimental Design; this species is not likely to occur in the pelagic environment.

Biological Opinion Summary:

In closing, the publication of the 2004 Biological Opinion (BO) calls for a number of tasks to be accomplished by NOAA-Fisheries. With respect to the Turtle Take Estimates (TTE) or the Net Mortality Ratio (NMR), neither is provided in this report as the POP does not have the staffing expertise to conduct these analyses. With reference to protected species, the 2004 BO required the NOAA-Fisheries to implement regulations for pelagic longline vessels to have the turtle handling and release gear on board. Beginning on August 4, 2004, the POP observers were provided a turtle gear checklist form issued by the Miami PR and given instructions to review the gear on each boat, fill out the checklist forms, and submit the forms with their data at the completion of the trip. In keeping with the BO reporting requirements from the POP office, observers filled out the turtle gear forms on all 14 of the quarter 4 observed vessels in the regular coverage. Following three industry organized turtle gear workshops held in February, April, and June of 2005, the presence of this gear required by the BO appears to be successful. Of the 14 vessels selected and observed in quarter 4, 79% (n=11) of the vessels had most of the equipment needed for removing gear from turtles in the water (at least 3 of 4 items aboard) and all (100%) had the equipment for removing gear if the turtle is boated (6 or more items aboard). Interestingly, 57% (N= 8) of the observed vessels also had the turtle tether aboard, which is voluntary at this time. A PDF document of the observer turtle gear forms will be posted on a secure site of the POP website for both the regular coverage and the CRP project. Finally, the cumulative number of unique vessels observed since the effective date of the sea turtle conservation regulations (July, 2004), now stands at 72 vessels covered (Table 5).

Attachments:

Tables 1 through 5.

cc: POP Coverage files; Gregg Houghaboom, NOAA-Fisheries SERO/OLE liaison.

Table 1: Regular coverage (8%) of the longline fleet. Number of vessels observed, areas of fishing activity, total sets observed, and total days at-sea conducted by the SEFSC Miami Laboratory POP from October 1 to December 31, 2005.

Vessel Number	Vessel Name	Trip Number	Area	Total SETS	Total Sea Days
938537	LEROY TENNISHOE ¹	A02023	GOM	8	12
682221	SEA HAWK	W01053	NEC	1	8
650401	SHARON G II	C02039	MAB	3	9
596805	MARY ANN ¹	S01073	----	0	1
596805	MARY ANN ¹	S01074	MAB	6	10
919799	BLUE SEA I	J02044	GOM	6	9
932650	ST. PETER	T02017	GOM	5	7
682221	SEA HAWK	W01054	MAB/NEC	3/2	10
650401	SHARON G II	C02040	MAB	2	6
586413	HATUNA MATATA ²	D04024	GOM	8	11
923317	SEA QUEEN	Q02056	GOM	7	10
902659	NIGHT STAR II	P01114	GOM	5	8
929813	CAPT BOB	S01075	MAB	6	10
593587	MISS MELLISSA	J02045	MAB	7	12
668316	CAPT LUU	Q02057	GOM	6	11
643282	OUTLAW	T02018	FEC	2	3
1031845	DESTINY	U03014	SAR	19	32
1026596	WHITEWATER ³				
1022773	EAGLE EYE II ⁴	W01055	SAR	?	?
----- TOTAL		----- 17	----- ---	----- 96	----- 169

Footnote:

1: Vessel selected for quarter 3, but observed in quarter 4.

2: Vessel split trip between the CRP experimental design and the regular 8% coverage.

3: Vessels selected for quarter 4, but rescheduled for early quarter 1, 2006.

4: Quarter 1, 2006 selected vessel that departed prior to end of year. Completed 2 sets in 2005.

Table 2: Coverage of the CRP bycatch reduction project fleet. Fleet is comprised of 6 contracted vessels of which 5 participated during quarter 4 (October 1 to December 31, 2005). Number of vessels observed, areas of fishing activity, total sets observed, and total days at-sea are provided.

Vessel Number	Vessel Name	Trip No.	Area	Total Sets	Total Sea Days
586413	HATUNA MATADA ¹	DO4024	GOM	4	5
	————	———	——	——	
	TOTAL	1		4	5

Footnote:

1: CPR trip scheduled during quarter 4.

Table 3: Percent coverage (by sets), the incidental take of Protected Resource species (turtles, mammals, seabirds), and hook effort summarized by geographical area for October 1 to December 31, 2005. (A=Alive, D=Dead, LB=Leatherback, LH=Loggerhead, U=unknown)

AREA	TOTAL SETS OBSERVED	REQUIRED 8% COVERAGE	TURTLES A LB/LH/U	D	MAMMALS A	D	BIRDS A	D
GOM-2	45(4+%)	94	4/ 0/0	1	0	0	0	0
FEC-3	2(8%)	0	0/ 0/0	0	0	0	0	0
MAB-5	27(4+%)	47	0/ 1/0	0	2	0	0	0
NEC-6	3(8%)	0	0/ 0/0	0	1	0	0	0
NED-7	0(0%)	7	0/ 0/0	0	0	0	0	0
SAR-8	19(8%)	0	4/ 3/0	0	2	0	0	0
TOTAL	96(5+%)	148	8/ 4/0	1	5	0	0	0

Hook effort Summary:

Area	Reg. 8% Coverage Hook effort	CRP Experiment(100%) Hook effort
GOM	32,379	2,350
FEC	696	0
MAB	21,717	0
NEC	3,035	0
SAR	19,851	0
TOTAL	77,678	2,350

2005 CRP Experiment AREA	Sets SETS	COVERAGE	TURTLES LB/LH/UN A	D	MAMMAL A	D	BIRDS A	D
GOM-2	4	100%	0/ 0/0	0	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	4		0/ 0/0	0	0	0	0	0

Table 4: Listing of vessels that were not covered by Pelagic Observer Program (POP) during quarter 4 2005 (October 1 to December 31). Short explanations provided. Vessel non-compliance of observer coverage may be based on more than one category of explanation. The following categories are provided: (1)No bunk available;(2)Observer presence exceeds the liferaft capacity;(3) Lack of current CFVSE decal; (4)No communication with observer office/staff; (5)Not fishing (involved in another fishery);(6)Not fishing (new owner, repair, sunk, no permits); and (7)other safety concerns.

<u>Vessel Name</u>	<u>Doc #</u>	<u>Remarks</u>
BIGEYE	628300	Reason 1, 2, and 3. Certified letter was received. Owner called the POP office on 10/17/05 indicating the vessel was fishing with a full crew. No bunk available for observer, liferaft would be exceeded, and did not have a current safety decal. POP requested 5 sets for the quarter. Logbook submission: Logs submitted for October, November, and December.
BJORN II	947927	Reason 4. Certified letter was received. No communication with the POP office. Vessel may have been involved in another fishery or fishing out of Canada. No confirmation. POP requested 6 sets for the quarter. Logbook submissions: Logs submitted for October only.
BOBALOU	600322	Reason 1 and 2. Certified letter was received. Owner called POP office on 10/14/05 that the vessel fishes on the weather making departures schedules difficult and carries a full crew. Observer would not have a bunk. Observer inspected the vessel to confirm lack of accommodations and crew size. The POP requested 3 set for quarter. Logbook submissions: Logs submitted for October, November, and December.

Table 4 (continued): Listing of vessels that were not covered by Pelagic Observer Program (POP) during quarter 4, 2005 (October 1 to December 31). Short explanations provided. Vessel non-compliance of observer coverage may be based on more than one category of explanation. The following categories are provided: (1)No bunk available;(2)Observer presence exceeds the liferaft capacity;(3) Lack of current CFVSE decal; (4)No communication with observer office/staff; (5)Not fishing (involved in another fishery);(6)Not fishing (new owner, repair, sunk, no permits); and (7)other safety concerns.

<u>Vessel Name</u>	<u>Doc #</u>	<u>Remarks</u>
BLUEFIN	597797	Reason 6 and 3. Certified letter was received. Owner called the POP office on 10/17/05 and 11/23/05. Owner having problem keeping a captain and crew for the boat. Vessel lacked a current marine safety decal. POP requested 5 sets for the quarter. Logbook submission: Logs submitted for October, November, and December.
CAPT GORMAN III	592269	Reason 4 and 5. Certified letter was received. Owner did not call the POP office during the quarter. Vessel reported several times for non-communication. However, the vessel may have been in another fishery during the quarter. The POP requested 9 sets for quarter. Logbook submissions: Owner did submit "No Fishing" reports for October, November, and December.
CAPT ROBINSON	907061	Reasons 7. Certified letter was received. Owner communicated with the POP office on 10/5, 10/28, 11/25, and 11/30. Observer sent to vessel, but did not depart due to observer's concern for safety. MSO agent removed Marine safety decal several days later. POP requested 6 sets for the quarter. Logbook submission: Logs submitted for late November and December.

Table 4 (continued): Listing of vessels that were not covered by Pelagic Observer Program (POP) during quarter 4, 2005 (October 1 to December 31). Short explanations provided. Vessel non-compliance of observer coverage may be based on more than one category of explanation. The following categories are provided: (1)No bunk available; (2)Observer presence exceeds the liferaft capacity; (3)Lack of current CFVSE decal; (4)No communication with observer office/staff; (5)Not fishing (involved in another fishery); (6)Not fishing (new owner, repair, sunk, no permits); and (7) other safety concerns.

<u>Vessel Name</u>	<u>Doc #</u>	<u>Remarks</u>
CAPT MICHAEL	610006	Reason 6 and 3. Certified letter was received. Owner called the POP office on 12/7. Vessel had not been fishing due to storm damage and crew problems. The Marine safety decal was not current. The POP requested 6 sets for quarter. Logbook submission: Logs submitted for December only.
DEFIANCE	229014	Reason 1 and 2. Certified letter was received. Owner call the POP office on 9/29. Owner indicated he fished on the weather making departure scheduling difficult and was carries a full crew. No bunk was available for the observer. POP requested 1 set for the quarter. Logbook submission: Logs submitted for October. No fishing in November and December.
GINA PAGE I	FL3716JU	Reasons 6. Certified letter was received. Owner called the POP office to state the vessel was sunk and would not be fishing. Trying to sell the fishing permits. POP requested 2 sets for the quarter.

Table 4 (continued): Listing of vessels that were not covered by Pelagic Observer Program (POP) during quarter 4, 2005 (October 1 to December 31). Short explanations provided. Vessel non-compliance of observer coverage may be based on more than one category of explanation. The following categories are provided: (1)No bunk available; (2)Observer presence exceeds the liferaft capacity; (3)Lack of current CFVSE decal; (4)No communication with observer office/staff; (5)Not fishing (involved in another fishery); (6)Not fishing (new owner, repair, sunk, no permits); and (7)other safety concerns.

<u>Vessel Name</u>	<u>Doc #</u>	<u>Remarks</u>
LINNEA C	699962	Reason 1 and 2. Certified letter was received. Owner called the POP office on 11/2 and 11/28. Owner states he fishes with a full crew and there would not be a bunk available for the observer. POP requested 9 sets for the quarter. Logbook submission: Logs submitted for October, November, and December.
MISS TAKE	667970	Reason 6. Certified letter was received. Owner sent a fax to POP office indicating that the vessel burned and sank. No longer in the fishery. POP requested 7 sets for the quarter.
SEA ANGEL	926754	Reasons 4. Certified letter was returned to the POP office as undeliverable. Owner was reported to OLE. A written Warning action was issued in December, 2005. POP requested 8 sets for quarter. Logbook submission:Logs submitted for October and November, but none for December.
MISS KAIT	913309	Reasons 5. Certified letter was received. Vessel (Sea Farmer)was sold and new owner notified the POP office in writing that the vessel was renamed and involved in the scallop fishery. POP requested 4 sets for the quarter.

Table 4 (continued): Listing of vessels that were not covered by Pelagic Observer Program (POP) during quarter 4, 2005 (October 1 to December 31). Short explanations provided. Vessel non-compliance of observer coverage may be based on more than one category of explanation. The following categories are provided: (1)No bunk available; (2)Observer presence exceeds the liferaft capacity; (3)Lack of current CFVSE decal; (4)No communication with observer office/staff; (5)Not fishing (involved in another fishery); (6)Not fishing (new owner, repair, sunk, no permits); and (7) other safety concerns.

<u>Vessel Name</u>	<u>Doc #</u>	<u>Remarks</u>
SENECA	532569	Reasons 6. Certified letter was received. Owner departed Canadian port prior to receiving selection letter. Due to poor fishing, owner stopped fishing for the quarter. POP requested 7 sets for quarter. Logbook submission: Logs submitted for October. No fishing in November and December.
SOUTHERN STAR	1049623	Reasons 4. Certified letter was received. Owner did not communication with the POP office during the quarter. Sources have indicated the vessel may not be fishing or involved in another fishery (snapper/grouper). POP requested 10 sets for the quarter. Logbook submission: No logs or no fishing reports submitted.
WHITE WATER	10265953	Reason 3. Certified letter was received. Owner informed the POP office that boat was not fishing for a while. Resumed fishing in December when current Marine safety decal was attained. Re-scheduled coverage for a Jan 6, 2006 departure. POP requested 4 set for quarter. Logbook submission: Logs submitted for late November and December.

Table 5: The POP coverage completed aboard the pelagic longline fleet by quarter and year since the publication of the 2004 Biological Opinion. The number of trips observed include vessels that are covered multiple times during a quarter. The number of unique vessels observed represents those vessels only covered once by an observer during a quarter and year.

Quarter	Year	No. of Vessels Selected	No. of Trips Observed	No. of Unique Vessels Observed
3	2004	44	29	29
4	2004	30	28	14
1	2005	34	26	12
2	2005	45	22	9
3	2005	41	19	7
4	2005	28	14	1
Cumulative Totals			138	72
